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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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MEMORANDUM

TO: ARA - Ambassador Vaky

FROM: ARA/CAR - Richard A. McCoy

SUBJECT: People's Temple

REFERENCE: ARA/CAR Memorandum Dated Sept. 11, 1978
Congressman Ryan's Request for Appointment

The following information is background data concerning the People's Temple religious organization activities in Guyana.

The People's Temple is a bi-racial psuedo religious organization that was founded by a Rev. Jim Jones. In general it was established to perform community services primarily in Los Angeles and San Francisco for the disadvantaged. The organization initially came to Guyana in 1973 to investigate the possibility of establishing a foreign community. After negotiations with the Government of Guyana the People's Temple was accorded a lease in 1974 to farm 27,000 acres in the North/West district of Guyana. This lease was to provide the People's Temple with sufficient area to develop an agricultural community for its members in the United States. This decision by the GOG to extend extensive acreage to the People's Temple is in line with the GOG policy to open up the interior of Guyana to agricultural development. Since July 1977 approximately 1200 people at the community have arrived in Guyana. The organization has been able to clear about 400 acres.

However, beginning in July 1977 press articles appeared on the West Coast that contained allegations by former members of the People's Temple that they had been defrauded out of their life savings and/or property by the organization. Further accusations

were made that members had undergone ritual beatings and long sessions of brain washing that resulted in members becoming psychologically intimidated and afraid for their life. When this influx of People's Temple members began in Guyana, the Embassy in Georgetown began to receive frequent welfare and whereabouts inquiries on the part of concerned relatives of members of the community. Family members feared that their relatives were being held against their will at the agricultural mission, forced to work long hours with little or no subsistance, that their mail was censored and that they were often physically beaten.

I personally travelled on three occasions to the agricultural site as part of my duties as Chief of the Consular Section in Georgetown. On every occasion I was unable to confirm the above allegations, and in personal private meetings with individuals I was insured by them that they had come to Guyana of their own free will and were satisfied with their present living conditions. I also discussed this matter informally with members of the Government of Guyana including the regional district officer having jurisdiction over the community and the regional police superintendent. On the basis of my observations, I believe some of the allegations to be untrue. At the same time, there is no question that members of the organization have been psychologically influenced to leave the United States to seek a better life in Guyana. The People's Temple has published documents and members have orally stated to me that they believe they are the victims of a conspiracy directed against the organization by right wing forces in the United States.

The People's Temple has organized itself as a communal. It proclaims to be a religious organization that espouses socialist philosophy. It has reportedly attracted many black members by claiming that some time in the future an American Government will resolve the racial problem by putting Black Americans in concentration camps.

Concurrently, with the above problem a child custody case arose in September 1977 when Mrs. Grace Stoen through her Guyanese Attorney sought to regain the custody of her four year old son who is presently in the custody of Rev. Jones. Mr. Timothy Stoen later entered the case with his wife (they were separated). However, since September 1977 while a number of hearings were held no decision was rendered. In a surprise move the Judge decided to return the case to the Chief Justice because of what he considered to be outside influences on the case. In this connection, Mr. and Mrs. Stoen have maintained that Jones has been able to influence high level members of the Government of Guyana into interceding in the case against them. We have no direct evidence of such involvement although at one point very early in the hearings, the former Foreign Minister Fred Wills in an attempt to resolve the matter quickly became overly involved. Consular Affairs has requested a status report on the case from the Embassy.

There have also been confrontations between the People's Temple and a new organization called The Concerned Relatives Incorporated. One issue is a $15 million slander suit against the People's Temple by the father of a member. There have been other accusations and counter accusations between the People's Temple and relatives of members that are too numerous to detail.

I have discussed the issue of the People's Temple with Assistant Secretary Watson and members of her staff on September 7 and of course had reported extensively on the subject during my tour in Georgetown.

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